Masterpiece in Focus

Soap Bubbles

BY JEAN-SIMÉON CHARDIN

Los Angeles County Museum of Art

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Essay by
Philip Conisbee

With a Note on Materials and Techniques by
Joseph Fronek

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Prepared in conjunction with the exhibition *Masterpiece in Focus: "Soap Bubbles" by Jean-Siméon Chardin,* October 18, 1990–January 20, 1991.

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Foreword

This is the first of a series of small exhibitions planned by the department of European Painting and Sculpture to focus scholarly attention on major works in the museum's collection. In our era of large traveling exhibitions, it is worthwhile to remind ourselves from time to time that we have great treasures here permanently in Los Angeles. One of the roles of the art museum is to encourage research into the works in its care and to share the fruits of such study with the public. Philip Conisbee, curator of European painting and sculpture, and Joseph Fronek, senior conservator of paintings, have made a careful scholarly and scientific study of Jean-Siméon Chardin's *Soap Bubbles* in the County Museum and of the two other extant autograph versions at the Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York, and the National Gallery of Art, Washington, D.C. The results of this collaboration between curator and conservator are presented in this booklet and in the exhibition, where we are privileged to present the three paintings together for the first time in public, along with Chardin's *Knucklebones* from the Baltimore Museum of Art.

We are very grateful that the idea of the exhibition was so enthusiastically supported by our colleagues in the lending institutions, and I would like to thank J. Carter Brown, director of the National Gallery of Art, Philippe de Montebello, director of the Metropolitan Museum of Art, and Arnold L. Lehman, director of the Baltimore Museum of Art. Dr. Alan Shestack, director of the Museum of Fine Arts, Boston, also kindly agreed to lend a print. I would like to join Philip Conisbee and Joseph Fronek in expressing our thanks to the following individuals who have given of their time and knowledge for the successful completion of the exhibition and this booklet: Elizabeth Algermissen, Peter Brenner, Trudi Casamassima, Sandy Davis, Diane DeGrazia, Alain Goldrach, Charlotte Hale, Amy McFarland, Joseph Newland, Richard Rand, Virginia Rasmussen, Pierre Rosenberg, Mary Sebera, Susan Siegfried, Mitch Tuchman, Elizabeth Walmsley, and Deenie Yudell.

Earl A. Powell III
Director
Los Angeles County Museum of Art

1. Jean-Siméon Chardin, *Soap Bubbles,* oil on canvas, 23⅝ x 28¾ in. (60.0 x 73.0 cm), Los Angeles County Museum of Art, gift of The Ahmanson Foundation.

Soap Bubbles

BY JEAN-SIMÉON CHARDIN

Philip Conisbee
Curator of European Painting and Sculpture

Soap Bubbles by Jean-Siméon Chardin (1699–1779) is one of the most popular old master paintings at the Los Angeles County Museum of Art (fig. 1). It shows a youth leaning on a stone parapet or window ledge, facing obliquely into the spectator's space and blowing a soap bubble at the end of a straw. The subject is an engaging one. We are struck especially by the absorption of the youth as he concentrates all his attention on the slowly expanding bubble. At his elbow on our left is a glass of soapy liquid and a stirring stick, while to our right we see the face of a small child in a plumed cap straining to see over the ledge in an attempt to watch the bubble. The youth wears a white shirt mostly covered by a brown, loose waistcoat, which is open at the armpit and reveals a dash of red lining and a tuck of shirt. His long hair is caught back by a large bow. Chardin calculated and balanced the design, carefully placing the full, soft, rounded form of the figure in its architectural setting. He loved above all to render the surface of things, but he gave them depth—of space and of feeling—by his artful disposition of light and shadow. Light and shade model his forms solidly, but his extensive use of shadow—in the backgrounds, for example, where he creates an almost palpable atmosphere—gives his works an air of mystery.

Drawing closer, we notice the remarkable richness of Chardin's paint, its variety of texture and color. It was the quality and interest of his paint surface, of his touch, that most engaged Chardin's fellow painters and the critics of his day. It drew comparisons with Rembrandt. The warm, brown forms are set in a dark, bluish ambience, and the polarities of color are signaled by flashes of saturated red and blue. Into the white shirt-sleeve, for example, is mixed a discreet harmony of reds and blues, drawing our eye back and forth to those glimpses of red lining in the waistcoat and the blue reflections in the soap bubble and the glass bottom. Touches of a warm beige that has been brought from the waistcoat play among the bluish shadows. A brush with red paint on it has moved across to accent the back of the arm where it meets

the shoulder, tightening the magical harmony of the design. The movements of Chardin's brush, his unique mixtures of color and texture, can be explored by each viewer. They are the greatest pleasures of his art.

Painting did not come easily to Chardin. His technique usually appears slow and deliberate. He was not interested in drawing in the conventional ways it was taught and practiced in the academies and studios of his day. Indeed, surviving drawings by Chardin can be numbered on one hand. He did not prepare his paintings with drawings, and only on rare occasions did he work out a composition in advance with an independent sketch in oils. Rather, he would arrange a still-life group or pose a figure and paint directly from observation, making any modifications on the canvas as he worked.

Chardin's contemporaries remarked on his singular way of working:

> *For want of being deep into drawing and making his studies and preparations on paper, M. Chardin is obliged to keep continually before him the object he intends to imitate, from the first painted sketch until he gives it the final touches, which is a long process and would put off anyone but him. Also he is always saying that his method of work costs him dearly in effort. When he wants to conceal this effort, his work reveals it despite him.*[1]

Thus wrote the perceptive critic and connoisseur Pierre-Jean Mariette (1714–74), who admired Chardin even though he was critical of his lack of classical training in draftsmanship. However, to Mariette's eye the design and execution of Chardin's paintings seemed somewhat overwrought and labored. But for us, in Chardin's deliberation lies much of his appeal.

Of course there is more to a painting by Chardin than meets the eye. Scientific techniques enable us to penetrate beneath its surface. It also has its place in art historical and broader cultural

2. Jean-Siméon Chardin, *Soap Bubbles*, oil on canvas, 24 x 24⅞ in. (61.0 x 63.2 cm), Metropolitan Museum of Art, Catherine D. Wentworth Fund, 1949.

3. Jean-Siméon Chardin, *Soap Bubbles*, oil on canvas, 36⅝ x 29⅓ in. (93.0 x 74.6 cm), National Gallery of Art, Washington, D.C., gift of Mrs. John W. Simpson, 1942.

4. Jean-Siméon Chardin, *Soap Bubbles*, oil on canvas, 23⅝ x 28¾ in. (60.0 x 73.0 cm), Los Angeles County Museum of Art, gift of The Ahmanson Foundation.

All three versions of *Soap Bubbles* are reproduced in color and to scale following page 25.

contexts. Chardin's vision and technique were indeed personal, but he was working within well-established artistic traditions. It is the aim of this booklet and the exhibition for which it is published to focus on his *Soap Bubbles* and explore these issues.

A remarkable feature of *Soap Bubbles* is that Chardin made at least three and probably four versions of the picture. This exhibition is the first public confrontation of the three extant paintings: the Los Angeles picture, acquired by the County Museum of Art in 1979; the version acquired by the Metropolitan Museum of Art in New York in 1949 (fig. 2), and the painting given to the National Gallery of Art, Washington, D.C., in 1942 (fig. 3).[2]

Why did Chardin repeat himself three or four times with *Soap Bubbles*? It was not unusual for French painters of the eighteenth century to repeat a successful design. For them originality lay more in the invention or the conception than in the execution of a work. Before the romantic period, with its emphasis on innovation, no stigma was attached to autograph replicas or variants. But Chardin repeated himself more often than his colleagues. The answer probably lies in the fact that he found it difficult to create an image in exactly the way he wanted it. The great critic Denis Diderot (1713–84), an ardent admirer of Chardin, observed, "Chardin copies himself frequently, which makes me think that his works cost him dearly."[3] Other contemporaries tell us that it was quite a struggle for Chardin to paint—invention, artistic composition, and the complicated poses and foreshortenings of the human figure were difficult for him to master. He probably needed to take full advantage of his hard-won successes. Rather than struggle to invent more configurations, why not replicate the successful ones a few times as long as there was a demand for them?

We know virtually nothing about Chardin's studio practice; indeed, by all contemporary accounts he seems to have been rather secretive about his working methods. We do not know to what extent, if at all, he employed studio assistants. In addition to the variants Chardin painted himself, a number of good eighteenth-century copies of his works exist, but we do not know if these were authorized or approved by the master. Eighteenth-century sale catalogues refer to "retouched copies" of works by Chardin, suggesting that perhaps he worked over or put the finishing touches onto approved copies of his paintings. But as yet no documents can be linked with works of art to confirm this practice. All three of the exhibited *Soap Bubbles* are, however, by Chardin himself.

Genre

Chardin established a solid reputation as a still-life painter in his native Paris in the 1720s and 1730s, and he is still remembered as one of the greatest European masters of that art. These early still

lifes normally depicted the traditional subject matter of dead game or, more personally and innovatively, kitchen utensils and simple foodstuffs. Then in the early 1730s (probably in 1733) he began to paint modest figure subjects, usually showing children at play or the various activities of kitchen maids and other servants. This type of subject matter was called *genre* painting to distinguish it from the more elevated literary and historical concerns of *history* painting.

If we follow Mariette, who in 1749 was Chardin's earliest biographer, *Soap Bubbles* was the artist's first effort at figure painting. Mariette tells us that Chardin had been teased by his friend the portrait painter Joseph Aved (1702–66) for being a painter of mere still life; this piqued him:

> *From this moment on he resolved to renounce his first talent; he had to choose another, and chance seemed to offer it to him. He had the opportunity to paint a head of a young man making soap bubbles, of which we have a print; he did it carefully from life, and applied himself to giving him a naive air; he showed it; people said good things about it; masters of the art praised the efforts he had made to get so far, and the enthusiasm shown by the curious for this new genre determined him to take it up.*[4]

We cannot be sure of the accuracy of Mariette's story, but a version of *Soap Bubbles* very likely is one of Chardin's earliest figure paintings, done in 1733 or, more plausibly, in 1734. The design is similar to his still-life paintings of the early 1730s, which take a low viewpoint of kitchen utensils or dead game placed on a thick stone ledge, often with some object breaking forward into the spectator's space, as, for example, in the Dublin *Still Life with Dead Game,* dated 1731 (fig. 5).

There is some corroboration for a date of about 1733 for the first *Soap Bubbles* because Chardin appears to have employed the same young man as a model for the servant in a painting dated that year, *Lady Sealing a Letter* (fig. 6). Moreover, both Mariette and the engraver and secretary to the Royal Academy Charles-Nicholas Cochin (1715–90), who knew Chardin much better but was writing later, in 1779, place Chardin's *Woman Drawing Water from an Urn,* also dated 1733 (fig. 8), at the same period of his conversion to genre painting. It is interesting to note in passing that a companion painting, *The Washerwoman* (fig. 7), includes a small child blowing soap bubbles. Indeed, Cochin claims *Woman Drawing Water from an Urn* as Chardin's first genre painting, which, because of its closer relationship to Chardin's still lifes of the early 1730s, seems more plausible than Mariette's suggestion. But that would only push *Soap Bubbles* a little later, say into 1734. Could a version of *Soap Bubbles* have been one of the "children's games, very well characterized," that Chardin exhibited in June 1734 at the Exposition de la Jeunesse, an open-air art exhibition held in Paris in the Place Dauphine? He certainly exhibited his *Lady Sealing a Letter* there, and perhaps also the little scullery interiors just mentioned.

5. Jean-Siméon Chardin, *Still Life with Dead Game,* 1731, oil on canvas, 32½ x 25⅝ in. (82.5 x 65.0 cm), National Gallery of Ireland, Dublin.

6. Jean-Siméon Chardin, *Lady Sealing a Letter,* 1733, oil on canvas, 57½ x 57⅝ in. (146.0 x 147.0 cm), Staatlichen Schlösser und Gärten, Schloss Charlottenburg, Berlin (photo: Jörg P. Anders).

7. Jean-Siméon Chardin, *The Washerwoman*, oil on canvas, 14¾ x 16¾ in. (37.5 x 42.5 cm), Nationalmuseum, Stockholm (photo: Statens Konstmuseer, Stockholm).

8. Jean-Siméon Chardin, *Woman Drawing Water from an Urn*, 1733, oil on panel, 14⅞ x 16½ in. (38.0 x 42.0 cm), Nationalmuseum, Stockholm (photo: Statens Konstmuseer, Stockholm).

The 1730s saw the beginning of a tremendous vogue among Parisian collectors for the small genre paintings that had been the specialty of Dutch and Flemish artists in the seventeenth century. Perhaps Chardin was inspired to take advantage of this new interest and market and to make his own modern renditions of their subject matter, traditionally drawn from everyday life. The theme of blowing bubbles was quite common in northern art of the seventeenth century, and Chardin could have known examples in the work of artists such as Caspar Netscher (1635/6–84) or Willem van Mieris (1662–1747).

Recent scholarship has shown that northern European paintings of the seventeenth century are not simple representations of everyday life, although they are full of observation and description, but often contain religious or secular moralizing messages. As historical and literary painting of the elevated type was relatively little practiced in the Low Countries, artists conveyed a serious message more obliquely through the meaning embodied in apparently insignificant objects, actions, or gestures in their genre paintings. Chardin and some other French painters of the eighteenth century who preferred not to be history painters in the grand manner adapted some of the alternative northern conventions of the previous century for their own time and place.

Chardin, moreover, wished to establish his credentials as a "serious" painter in the eyes of his fellow members of the elite Royal Academy, to which he had been elected in 1728. In their hieratic, theoretical thinking still life was the basest form of painting, relying merely on the observation of nature. History painting, drawing its subjects from the heroic deeds of ancient and modern history, literature, or the Bible, was considered the highest art—conceptual, morally elevated, and more difficult to invent and create. Chardin did not have the thorough academic training, and hence the technical facility, nor the inclination to become a history painter. Rather, he chose down-to-earth, everyday subjects, showing only one, two, or at most three figures, and re-

9. Willem van Mieris, *Blowing Bubbles,* oil on panel, 12⅝ x 10⅜ in. (32.0 x 26.5 cm), Musée du Louvre, Paris.

10. Hendrick Goltzius, *Quis Evadet?*, 1594, engraving, Bibliotheque Nationale, Paris.

lied more on observation than on the cerebral invention needed to design complicated scenes for history paintings. He followed the example of the northern little masters (as they were called) of the seventeenth century and raised the intellectual content of his art by investing these modest scenes, ostensibly observed in the everyday life around him, with some moral or didactic message.

Soap Bubbles is among Chardin's earliest attempts at a relatively large-scale figure. The drawing of the head and hands in the Washington picture especially is comparable to that of the servant in the Berlin *Lady Sealing a Letter* of 1733 (fig. 6), and, as observed already, Chardin seems to have employed the same model for the figure of the youth. Moreover, the genre subject matter of both these works is especially close to the Dutch artists of the seventeenth century who were Chardin's prototypes in this type of painting. Later his choice of subjects would become more personal and original.

Image and Meaning

In *Soap Bubbles* Chardin was indeed drawing on a long iconographic tradition. He very likely knew the painting by Willem van Mieris of *Blowing Bubbles* (fig. 9), which was in the collection of the Prince de Carignan before it entered the royal collection in 1742. Carignan, who died in 1741, also owned paintings by Chardin. The work by Mieris is a more anecdotal and naturalistic interpretation of one of the great vanity images of the late Renaissance. One of the most famous of these is by Hendrick Goltzius (1558–1616), *Quis Evadet?* (Who can evade it?), whose very title spells out the fragility and temporality of all human life and endeavor (fig. 10). In addition to the fleeting bubbles, Goltzius introduced other images of life's transience, such as a flower

11. Nicolas Tardieu (1674–1749) after Nicolas Lancret, *Air,* 1732, engraving, Bibliotheque Nationale, Paris.

in bloom, a death's-head, and smoke dispersing in the breeze. In a print after Chardin's contemporary Nicolas Lancret (1690–1743) representing the element *Air* (fig. 11), we see a variety of images of the vanity of the world, including a youth standing on a table, blowing bubbles that will soon vanish into thin air. But Lancret stated the theme with wit and elegant good taste in a fanciful, parklike setting, all of which is typical of the lighthearted decorative painting of the earlier part of the century.

Chardin's adoption of this time-honored theme of the vanity of the world is more serious in mood, although quite discreetly so. At first glance it seems we are looking at a simple slice of life, a little scene that caught Chardin's eye as he walked down a Paris street or crossed a courtyard. We share some of the anticipation of the little child behind who can barely see what is happening on our side of the window ledge. We can imagine the bubble's expansion as it reaches its point of bursting, or floating out into our space. But there is something meditative about the absorption of Chardin's youth—for example, he lacks the contrasting carefree abandon of the boy in Mieris's image of *Blowing Bubbles.* The gravity of his mood is expressed by the way Chardin has modeled his forms so solidly, with their decisive silhouette and full, richly impastoed surfaces. He is almost a still life and as architectonic as his surroundings. In these ways, variously iconographic and formal, Chardin rethinks the traditional northern genre subject and invests the everyday with a hint of darker, more serious truths.

Chardin exhibited a version of *Soap Bubbles* at the Salon exhibition held in Paris from August to September of 1739. The Salon exhibition was a new feature of the Parisian art world, instituted on a relatively regular basis only in 1737, albeit a rather exclusive exhibition of works by artists who were members or associate members of the Royal Academy. It took place in the Salon Carré of the royal palace of the Louvre, hence the name *Salon.* These eighteenth-century Salons can claim to be the first regularly instituted temporary exhibitions of contemporary art—beginning an age of exhibitions, great and small, that would gain tremendous momentum in the nineteenth century and continues in our own day.

Naturally Chardin took advantage of his membership of the Royal Academy to exhibit his art to the public and showed works at most of the Salons held during his lifetime, from 1737 until 1779, the year of his death. Although he was well known as a painter of still life in the 1730s, he preferred to exhibit only figure subjects at the Salons of the 1730s and 1740s. Not only did their human content give Chardin a little more standing in the eyes of his fellow academicians, but their anecdotal nature and their everyday cast of characters were calculated to appeal to the large and diverse public that attended the Salons.

When Chardin exhibited his genre scenes at the Salon, they were usually engraved within weeks or a few months of the exhibition. An engraving by Pierre Filloeul (1696-after 1754) after *Soap Bubbles* (fig. 12) was announced in the *Mercure de France* in

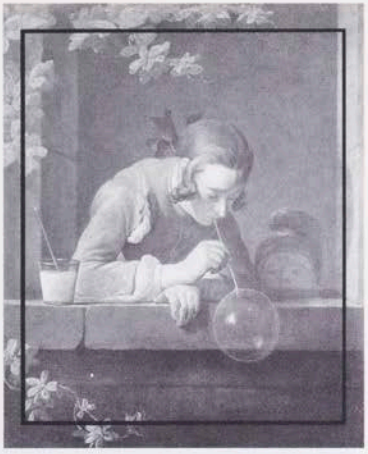
December 1739, only three months after the close of the Salon. Engraving was the standard way to reproduce paintings in quantity in Chardin's day. Indeed, French engravers of the eighteenth century raised their own art to a high level of technical sophistication. The quality of engravings after Chardin's works varied from relatively crude images to prints of considerable beauty and finesse in their own right. The fact that these engravings were normally published soon after the paintings were exhibited at the Salon testifies both to the popularity of Chardin's art and to a growing public appetite for visual images. Chardin and his engravers benefited financially from this interest, although at present the details of their contractual arrangements are not known. Of course Chardin was not the only artist to exploit this market. The considerable production of reproductive engravings made in Paris in the middle of the eighteenth century can surely be linked to the wider public awareness of art through the Salon exhibitions, where the latest contemporary paintings were presented on a regular basis. If only an extremely limited and wealthy clientele could acquire a painting (and Chardin was not a prolific painter), a much larger public could own a vivid reminder of the original work in the form of an engraving. Thus an artist's reputation would spread far beyond the walls of the Paris Salon or the exclusive homes of privileged collectors in France or abroad.

When Chardin exhibited a version of *Soap Bubbles* at the Salon of 1739, it was described in the catalogue as "a small painting representing the frivolous play of a young man, blowing soap bubbles." From this description it seems that Chardin's "message" is simply an admonitory one, that the youth is wasting his time on a trivial pursuit. Indeed this may have been at least part of Chardin's intended meaning. But the more public his art became, first by exhibition at the Salon and then by dissemination through engravings, the more easily accessible and even trivial its meaning was rendered for wider consumption. It is common for eighteenth-century reproductive engravings to bear "explanatory" verses at the bottom of the image along with the title, credit, and publication lines. The verses are usually moralizing in tone and were supplied by the engraver. Their meaning was not necessarily endorsed by the original painter. Often they are mildly amorous in tone, but their intention was rarely anything more serious than an attempt to catch as wide a public as possible. The verses on Filloeul's *Soap Bubbles* read:

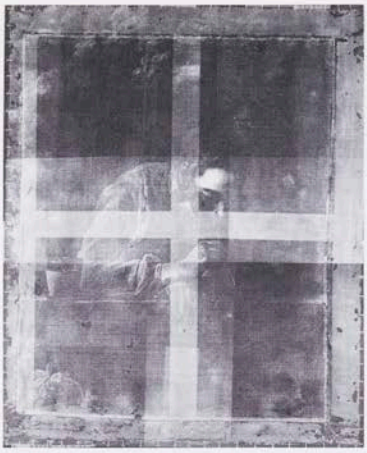
Consider well, young man,
These little globes of soap.
Their movement so variable,
Their luster so fragile,
Will prompt you to say with reason,
That many an Iris in this is very like them.

But, as has been shown above in the discussion of the meaning of *Soap Bubbles,* it is unlikely that Chardin was thinking of the

12. Pierre Filloeul after Chardin, *Soap Bubbles,* 1739, engraving, National Gallery of Art, Washington, D.C., Rosenwald Collection.



13. Diagram showing additions to Chardin's *Soap Bubbles,* National Gallery of Art, Washington, D.C.



14. X-radiograph of Chardin's *Soap Bubbles,* National Gallery of Art, Washington, D.C.

fickleness of a woman's heart when he created this moving image in his painting.

The Vertical *Soap Bubbles*

The preceding discussion of the meaning of *Soap Bubbles* and its place in Chardin's work can apply to any or all three of the extant versions of the painting. But what can be said about the three pictures in relation to one another? First of all we must examine the Washington version in comparison with these and other works by the artist. It is larger than the New York and Los Angeles pictures and vertical in format (figs. 27–29). In spite of the fact that the painting has been enlarged on all sides, its original dimensions were probably always greater than those of the other versions, and it was always vertical rather than horizontal in format. Originally this painting measured about 31½ x 25¾ in. In a raking light, or in the ideal scientific conditions of a conservation studio, it is possible to see that strips of canvas have been stitched on, adding 2¾ in. each at top, bottom and right, and 1¼ in. at left (fig. 13). Now the painting measures 36⅝ x 29⅜ in. Cusping along the edges of the interior canvas—stretches at the edge of a canvas where it has been pulled when tacked to the wooden stretcher frame behind—that is visible in the X-radiograph (fig. 14), indicates that it was once stretched independent of the extensions. The paint covering the extensions overlaps the paint located on the interior rectangle, meaning that the central canvas must have been painted before the extensions were added. Analysis of the pigments reveals that the paints used throughout were all known in Chardin's day. However, there are pigments in the honeysuckle leaves not found elsewhere in the painting, which indicates they too were added on a separate occasion from the execution of the

central field. For these and for stylistic reasons the additions of canvas and the superimposed honeysuckle leaves were most likely made by a second artist at a later date [5]

If we look more closely at Filloeul's 1739 engraving of *Soap Bubbles* (fig. 15), which is vertical in format like the Washington painting, the most noticeable departure from all three known paintings is in the wall beneath the projecting ledge on which the youth leans. In the engraving we can see the top of a low relief, set into the wall, with the heads of four children or putti just visible on the right half. Of the three extant works, only the vertical Washington painting is deep enough to accommodate this feature (even without the strip of canvas added later at the bottom). One observer has argued that traces of the children's heads in the relief could just be perceived above the lower tendril of honeysuckle.[6] Vague shapes can indeed be discerned there with the naked eye, as can, further to the right, a vertical crack in the wall that is found quite clearly in the engraving. But one cannot *prove* whether or not this relief was once present in the Washington painting. Scientific examination—by X-radiography, ultraviolet radiation, infrared photography or reflectography—tells us no more than we can see in normal viewing conditions in a good light.

15. Filloeul after Chardin, *Soap Bubbles.*

It is possible that when the Washington painting was extended and the honeysuckle painted on, the relief was misunderstood, or ignored, or the second artist simply did not know how to continue it, so it was obliterated and painted over. The extension on the right side in the form of the vertical stone jamb and the heavy-handed honeysuckle at top and bottom left have been none too sensitively added. By comparison, the tendrils of honeysuckle in the New York painting (fig. 2) were undoubtedly painted by Chardin—and can be compared with those in the Dublin *Still Life with Dead Game* of 1731 (fig. 5). It is equally possible, and indeed seems more likely, that there never was a relief in the Washington painting. It was included only in the painting engraved by Filloeul and dropped from the subsequent versions. (Filloeul and the other good engravers of the day did not embellish with ideas of their own the works they reproduced. Faithfulness to the original was their aim.)[7]

If the surface of the Washington *Soap Bubbles* has suffered considerably in the last 250 years from additions, overzealous cleanings, and insensitive restorations, it is still a beautiful image that retains much of Chardin's original poetry, his mellow colors, his bold, solid design, and the moving absorption of the young man as he concentrates on the quietly growing bubble.

Pendants and Pentimenti

When Chardin exhibited a version of *Soap Bubbles* at the Salon of 1739, he also showed four other figure subjects, all four of which

16. Pierre Filloeul after Chardin, *Knucklebones,* 1739, engraving, National Gallery of Art, Washington, D.C., Rosenwald Collection.

17. Jean-Siméon Chardin, *Knucklebones,* oil on canvas, 32½ x 25½ in. (81.5 x 65.4 cm), Baltimore Museum of Art, Mary Frick Jacobs Collection.

can be identified today with existing paintings. Three months after the close of the Salon at the end of September, a December issue of the *Mercure de France* announced the publication of three prints after works by Chardin. One of these was *The Governess,* finely engraved by François-Bernard Lépicié (1698–1755) after a painting shown at the Salon (now in the National Gallery of Canada, Ottawa). The other two prints, vertical in format, were Pierre Filloeul's *Soap Bubbles* (fig. 15) and a companion or pendant, *Knucklebones* (fig. 16). It cannot be proved that the *Soap Bubbles* engraved by Filloeul was the version exhibited at the Salon, but this is likely, as normally when a painting by Chardin was engraved, it had indeed been exhibited. A painting of *Knucklebones,* however, is not recorded at the Salon, but sometimes works were included in the Salon only at the last minute and did not appear in the catalogue. It would be unusual for *Knucklebones* to have been engraved if it were not exhibited as a painting. In either case the print is almost certainly after the work now in the Baltimore Museum of Art (fig. 17), which is the only recorded painting of this subject by Chardin and is followed in every detail by Filloeul's engraving.

18. Chardin, *Knucklebones.*

19. X-radiograph of Chardin's *Knucklebones.*

The dimensions of the Washington *Soap Bubbles* before the later additions are approximately the same as those of the Baltimore *Knucklebones* (31½ x 25¾ in. and 32 x 25½ in., respectively). It has been suggested that they were painted as pendants and that they are the two paintings engraved as a pair by Filloeul in 1739.[8] There is little doubt that the unique Baltimore *Knucklebones* is indeed the painting engraved by Filloeul. The X-radiograph of this painting (fig. 19) reveals something of Chardin's working method—there are extensive pentimenti (alterations made in the composition while the artist was painting it) in the position of the fingers of both the girl's hands, in the neckline of her bodice (which is lowered in the final painting), and in the profile of her face and her body; also the knucklebones have been rearranged. Pentimenti are visible to the naked eye along the top edge of the sleeve of her raised arm.

Study of some of Chardin's other genre pictures with half-length figures painted during the 1730s has revealed similar pentimenti.[9] For example, the X-radiograph of the *Young Man with a Violin* (figs. 20, 21) reveals second thoughts in the position of his head, body, and the music stand in front of him as well as considerable modifications made by the artist in the proportions of the canvas itself. In paintings such as this, and even in the case of some of Chardin's still lifes, the first version of a particular composition is usually wrought with quite obvious changes, but the second and subsequent versions tend to be thinner in handling and, more importantly here, have fewer or no adjustments.

Chardin did not paint replicas of his *Young Man with a Violin* or of *Knucklebones,* so each one is the first and only version of the subject. In the Baltimore painting the pose of the girl is unusually open and full-face for Chardin, and he clearly had some difficulty depicting her without awkwardness. The depiction of the human figure never came easily to Chardin. If we admit to this awkwardness of design and execution, we can perhaps understand why Chardin decided not to repeat *Knucklebones.* It is also unusual, in-

20. Jean-Siméon Chardin, *Young Man with a Violin,* oil on canvas, 26⅝ x 29⅛ in. (67.5 x 74.5 cm), Musée du Louvre, Paris (photo: Giraudon).

deed unique, for Chardin to show a figure so much in movement. He did not attempt that again either. All his other figures are static in pose, and the forms tend to be closed and monumental.

In X-radiographs none of Chardin's versions of *Soap Bubbles* is shown to have pentimenti of any kind. This leads to the supposition that there was at least one other version, a "first" version, the painting engraved by Filloeul and the true pendant of the Baltimore *Knucklebones.* The Baltimore picture and the now-lost first version of *Soap Bubbles* could have been the pair of paintings which appeared in the estate sale of the architect Pierre Boscry (d. 1781) in 1781. Subsequently they reappeared together in the Gruel sale in 1811. After 1811 we lose trace of them, but at some time they were separated, and *Knucklebones* only reappeared in a sale in 1905.[10]

If the above provenance for *Knucklebones* and its lost pendant *Soap Bubbles* is correct (and if there were no more than four autograph versions of *Soap Bubbles*!), then the Washington version of *Soap Bubbles* is only first recorded in 1845, in the collection of the painter Alphonse Roehn (1780–1867), when it was described in an article on Chardin in *L'Artiste,* and by which time it had gained its frame of leaves:

> *We have just seen one of the most ravishing and best-preserved paintings of Chardin in the atelier of M. Roehn. This signed painting depicts a very simple and charming young boy dressed in the style of Louis XIV* [sic], *leaning out a window which is framed by vines and clusters of ivy leaves, amusing himself by blowing soap bubbles. Nothing could be more natural, more graceful, or more harmonious than this charming composition. It is nature caught in the act, without dazzling color or the least affectation. You have seen this young boy twenty times, a hundred times, at a courtyard window or in a garden; he reminds you nostalgically of your own childhood.*[11]

21. X-radiograph of Chardin's *Young Man with a Violin* (cropped slightly).

The emphasis on the window "framed by vines and clusters of ivy leaves" does seem to point to the Washington painting, and it is quite possible that the additions were made when *Soap Bubbles* was in Roehn's collection. By 1860 this enlarged picture was in the collection of Laurent Laperlier (1805–78), who lent it to an exhibition in Paris that year; it was sold in the Laperlier sale in April 1867.[12] Where stylistic criteria can be applied to the additions to the Washington canvas, it can be said that the vertical stone wall at the right of the painting is thinly and weakly executed and is not from Chardin's hand. Nor do the bold dabs of paint for the honeysuckle leaves seem like his work. If the handling of the Washington picture seems smoother, less impastoed, and less grainy in texture than the Baltimore *Knucklebones,* this is in part due to the different condition of the two works, but it also lends support to the hypothesis that they were never pendants. If there is a sense of Chardin's artistic struggle in the Baltimore painting, this is absent from the more smoothly and easily ex-

ecuted Washington *Soap Bubbles,* in which he would have followed the lost prototype design.

The Three *Soap Bubbles* Compared

The New York and the Los Angeles *Soap Bubbles* are related to each other by their similar dimensions and by their common horizontal format. Chardin incorporated decorative honeysuckle leaves into the Metropolitan painting (fig. 27), but not in the County Museum's version (fig. 29). While it is only about 3/8 in. taller than the Los Angeles picture, the Metropolitan *Soap Bubbles* is 3 7/8 in. narrower and seems to have been trimmed at the right, leaving little space for the watching child's fingers to cling to the ledge. However, if it is the painting recorded in the auction of the collection of the architect Louis-François Trouard (1725–94) in 1779, the Metropolitan picture has only lost about one inch if anything, for that work measured about 24 1/2 x 25 3/4 in.[13] The X-radiograph of the Metropolitan painting reveals that at some time it may have been cut substantially along the top and bottom. There are no signs of the cusping that we would normally expect to see here. If it was indeed in the Trouard collection, it would have been cut down already in Chardin's time, probably to form a pendant to the horizontal *House of Cards* (now lost) that was its companion in the Trouard sale. But we shall probably never know the answer to such an intriguing problem.

It has not been possible to reach many conclusions about the original relationships between the three extant versions of *Soap Bubbles.* The central design—the youths and the glass of soap and straw with bubble—is the same in size and silhouette in all three pictures. One can see this by superimposing the X-radiographs of the three paintings. Only slight differences can be found. The most obvious is in the angle of the youth's head, but there are also subtle differences in the sizes of highlights. With such exact replication one would expect to find incise marks or grids or some such evidence for transfer of a drawing or cartoon onto the priming layer. But, infrared photography and microscopic examination indicate no such marks. The design could have been drawn in with the first layer of paint or with chalk so that it is not obvious to us today, but since there are no primary descriptions of Chardin's working methods, this cannot be verified. What is clear is that to re-create this image almost exactly three times there must have been some kind of pattern. More than likely Chardin did use a drawing or template to re-create the central image over and over, changing only the proportions of the surrounding area and the dimensions of the canvas as a whole. Moreover, raking light, X-radiography, and infrared photography and reflectography show no pentimenti in any of the pictures. It should also be noted that there are no overlapping forms. That is, the glass of bubble soap does not lie over an already painted elbow; the bubble

blower's hand is not resting on an already painted ledge. Obviously the composition was very well planned before painting.

How should the three existing versions of *Soap Bubbles* be dated? If Mariette's account is followed, at least the lost first version would date from around 1733, with Chardin's earliest genre paintings. As observed already, a version of *Soap Bubbles* could have been among the paintings showing children's games exhibited by Chardin at the Exposition de la Jeunesse in 1734. A *Soap Bubbles* was certainly exhibited at the Salon of 1739. While it could have been executed at any time between 1733 and 1739, it was most likely the one engraved by Filloeul—the first version that has been missing since 1811. It was not unusual for Chardin to exhibit earlier works at a Salon; for example, *Lady Sealing a Letter,* painted in 1733, was exhibited at the Salon of 1738. If the first *Soap Bubbles* was as well received as Mariette suggests, then Chardin could understandably have been tempted to repeat the successful design. He may have made the several replicas more-or-less at the same time, around 1733–34, or at the time of its public exhibition in the Salon, or he could have returned to the theme when a client asked for it. But the style of all three existing versions does suggest that they were all executed in the early or mid-1730s, not later in his career. It does seem that they were all executed within quite a short time, within a matter of months from the time of the first version.

If we study the three extant paintings with the naked eye or in X-radiographs, we are struck by the rich impasto and brushwork of the New York painting (fig. 27), perhaps done closer in time to the first version. Its handling can be compared with that of *Knucklebones* (fig. 17). The rather smoother and relatively schematic execution of the Los Angeles and Washington paintings (figs. 29, 28) seems to betray less effort, suggesting that they were painted subsequently. This does not reduce their interest and quality as works of art—they are subtle variations on the original theme.

If *Soap Bubbles* was indeed Chardin's first essay in painting a genre subject on a relatively large scale, it perhaps meant a lot to him. He kept a version of it in his possession all his life: in the inventory of his effects after his death in 1779 there was "a boy making soap bubbles, valued at 24 *livres.*" Alas, we have no idea which version this was, nor of its dimensions.

Pendants and Meaning

Chardin quite often conceived or at least presented his paintings in pairs. His aim was to reinforce their meaning. Through studying the false pair of the Washington *Soap Bubbles* and the Baltimore *Knucklebones* in conjunction with various versions of Chardin's paintings, it has been possible to propose a method of

22. Pierre Filloeul after Chardin, *The House of Cards,* engraving, Bibliotheque Nationale, Paris.

23. Pierre Filloeul after Chardin, *Lady Taking Tea,* engraving, Bibliotheque Nationale, Paris.

identifying the first and subsequent versions of Chardin's paintings. But this should not distract us from considering the meaning of the original pair of these subjects. *Soap Bubbles* was both an admonitory image, for the youth is wasting his time, and a vanity, reminding us of the transience of human life and endeavor. The girl in *Knucklebones,* playing an early form of jacks, is also seen to be wasting her time. She should be at work: she is wearing a working apron, and her scissors, resting conspicuously on the edge of the table, should be keeping her hands busy. Seen together, the two paintings set up a complementary visual rhythm and also reinforce each other's meaning.

The horizontal version of *Soap Bubbles* in the Trouard collection in 1779—perhaps the Metropolitan picture, as suggested above—had a pendant, showing a boy building a house of cards. This particular *House of Cards* is lost, but again it visually and conceptually complemented *Soap Bubbles.* The boy is idling away his time, and furthermore the house of cards that is the object of his innocent attention is as insubstantial and transitory as a bubble. The only known *House of Cards* where the boy faces to our left—as he must to be a companion to the boy in *Soap Bubbles* and to face right in a (reversed) engraving—is a painting at Nuneham Priory, England, but it has been proven that that picture was originally the pendant to Chardin's *Lady Taking Tea,* 1735 (Hunterian Museum, Glasgow); they were engraved as pendants by Pierre Filloeul (figs. 22, 23).[14] Probably there was another version of the *House of Cards,* which has been lost and unrecorded since 1779, that was the pendant of the New York *Soap Bubbles.*

Did the Los Angeles *Soap Bubbles* ever have a pendant? There is no conclusive evidence. In four sales during the eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries versions of *Soap Bubbles* more or less the same size as the Los Angeles picture were paired with versions of *The Schoolmistress.* Possibly it was the same pair of pictures at each sale.[15] The only surviving *Schoolmistress* of the same dimensions as the Los Angeles *Soap Bubbles* is now in the National Gal-

24. Jean-Siméon Chardin, *The Young Schoolmistress,* oil on canvas, 24¼ x 26⅛ in. (61.5 x 66.5 cm), reproduced by courtesy of the Trustees of the National Gallery, London.

lery of Ireland, Dublin. Unfortunately this last painting is but a shadow of its former self—it is badly abraded and has suffered from overzealous cleanings in the past. The finest extant version of *The Schoolmistress* is now in the National Gallery, London (fig. 24), along with a *House of Cards* that was probably its original pendant: they were engraved as pendants by François-Bernard Lépicié in 1740 and 1743, respectively. It is fascinating to watch Chardin vary the role of pendants in his work. Rather than complement each other, the two pairs of *The Schoolmistress* and *The House of Cards* and of *The Schoolmistress* and *Soap Bubbles* form contrasting pairs, illustrating respectively "industry" and "idleness." The schoolmistress is usefully employed in teaching the little child to read, while the youths blowing bubbles or building a house of cards are squandering their time on trivial pursuits and are oblivious to the darker symbolism that can be attached to what they are doing. Moreover, in *Soap Bubbles* a small child is watching an idle, time-wasting activity—his counterpart in *The Schoolmistress* is, by contrast, being set a good example.

For all that we can discover about Chardin and his art through the research of documents, the scientific study of his paintings, by studying their provenance or history, and by comparing them side-by-side, there will always remain an air of mystery around the artist and his work. Perhaps he wanted it that way. Like his contemporaries, we can still enjoy his magic, as he conjures form from rich pigments and places his figures solidly before us in their circumambient air.

Notes

1. Quoted in Georges Wildenstein, *Chardin* (Paris 1933), p. 31.

2. The three paintings were seen together by scholars at a symposium in Boston in November 1979 during the *Chardin* exhibition there. The Los Angeles picture was still on the market at that time. The catalogue of the exhibition, by Pierre Rosenberg (Paris and Cleveland, 1979), is indispensible for the study of Chardin. See also Pierre Rosenberg, *Chardin: New Thoughts* (Lawrence, Kansas, 1983); Pierre Rosenberg, *Tout l'oeuvre peint de Chardin* (Paris, 1983), hereinafter Rosenberg 1983. The issues discussed in this booklet have all been raised in Rosenberg's three publications, and I am enormously indebted to his scholarship and encouragement.

3. Jean Seznec and Jean Adhémar, eds., *Diderot: Salons* (Oxford, 1967) 4:83.

4. Quoted in Wildenstein 1933, p. 31.

5. Detailed scientific analysis of the Washington *Soap Bubbles* was made by William R. Leisher, when a conservator at the National Gallery of Art, and presented in an unpublished report, May 31, 1978 (National Gallery curatorial files); his conclusions are summarized in Rosenberg 1979 and 1983. The painting was studied in 1990 by Joseph Fronek and myself with the assistance of Elizabeth M. Walmsley, assistant conservator at the National Gallery of Art. Rosenberg 1983, p. 91, no. 97d, publishes *"une bonne copie"* of *Soap Bubbles* in a private collection in Paris, which corresponds to the Filloeul engraving. It was sold in Versailles (Martin), 24 May 1981, no. 30, as "Studio of Chardin," 32⅛ x 25⅝ in. (81.5 x 65 cm). Judging from the photograph in the sale catalogue the execution has the stiff quality of a copy, although it appears to be of good quality. It is presumably after the lost original engraved by Filloeul.

6. The observer was William R. Leisher; see note 5.

7. One other difference exists in the design that has not been discussed. In the Washington painting the boy's sleeve has three buttonholes, but in the engraving there are only two. The paint in this area of the sleeve appears to be somewhat abraded and broken up, and in the after-cleaning photograph there is a dark spot (damage?) between the two outside buttonholes that may have been misunderstood as a remnant for a third one. But, from Joseph Fronek's and my examination and as there are only two buttonholes on the boy's sleeves in the other paintings, we would guess that this third one was mistakenly added during the restoration.

8. The suggestion was Leisher's; see note 5. Rosenberg 1979 and 1983 expressed reservations, which are shared and expanded here.

9. See Rosenberg 1979, p. 214; Ross Merrill, when head of Paintings Conservation at the National Gallery of Art, in "A Step toward Revising Our Perception of Chardin," *Preprints of Papers Presented at the Ninth Annual Meeting of the American Institute for Conservation of Historic and Artistic Works, Philadelphia, Pennsylvania, 27–31 May 1981* (Washington, D.C., 1981), pp. 123–28. I am grateful to Pierre Rosenberg for providing photographs of the Louvre *Young Man with a Violin* and its X-radiograph.

10. For the provenances, see Rosenberg 1979, pp. 205–8; Rosenberg 1983, p. 92.

11. Rosenberg 1979, p. 205, citing *L'Artiste*, 5 August 1845, p. 72.

12. Rosenberg 1979, p. 205.

13. For the Trouard provenance, see Rosenberg 1979, pp. 208–9; Rosenberg 1983, p. 91.

14. See David Carritt, "Mr. Fauquier's Chardins," *The Burlington Magazine*, 116 (September 1974): 502–9.

15. For the sales in question, in Paris in 1776, 1780, 1786 and 1801, see Rosenberg 1979, pp. 208–9, 228; Rosenberg 1983, pp. 91, 94.

The Materials and Technique of the Los Angeles *Soap Bubbles*

Joseph Fronek
Senior Conservator of Paintings

Chardin's painting methods were personal and complex, and it is not easy to understand with only a casual look how he created, in the technical sense, any one of his pictures. Even in Chardin's own day critics debated how the artist achieved his effects in paint. Patient examination of the paintings in this exhibition and of the Los Angeles picture especially have revealed some of Chardin's working methods, which are presented here in the same sequence that Chardin would have followed in creating the work of art, from the raw canvas to the final touches of paint.

The three *Soap Bubbles* and *Knucklebones* all are on a similar support. It is a plain-weave, medium-weight linen with 30–38 threads per inch. At a later date each of the paintings was lined to canvas and mounted on a new stretcher. At various times in the past the dimensions of all four paintings have been changed to some degree.[1]

Chardin usually used a double ground on his canvas supports, just as he did in the paintings here. A red-ocher priming normally lies beneath a light gray-brown priming, which appears to be a mixture of white (chalk and white lead), carbon black, and brown earth pigments.[2] This type of layered ground produces an optical gray, the purpose of which is to give vibrancy and depth to the painting. From X-radiographs a bit more can be learned about how the ground was applied. In the X-radiographs of the four paintings hundreds of tiny parallel streaks are visible. These lines were probably made by a stiff brush used to spread the ground on the canvas. Perhaps this was a common technique among eighteenth-century French artists; for example, it is also found in the museum's *Portrait of the Devin Family* of 1767 by Louis Michel van Loo.

In the Los Angeles *Soap Bubbles,* the artist broadly painted in the main design on top of the ground, laying in the figure of the boy blowing bubbles and the ledge and glass with a translucent dark brownish color. This layer, which seems to be a mixture of black and earth pigments and is visible to the naked eye in many

of the shadows, shows up in cross sections taken from the Los Angeles painting (fig. 25; viewing such cross sections under high magnification allowed the identification of paint layers and some pigments). With the main design blocked in, the artist colored the background with translucent green (a mixture of black and yellow pigments).[3]

Once the thin underpainting was dry, the artist could begin applying middle tones and highlights. White, red, and yellow pigments were mixed in varying proportions for the flesh;[4] for the coat, Chardin used black, yellow, and white. These colors were applied in two to four layers wet in wet working from the darker to lighter tones. While applying these lighter colors, the artist reserved the dark underpainting for the shadows. We can see this quite clearly in the X-radiograph (fig. 26) because the thickly applied highlights appear white due to density whereas the less dense layers appear dark.

The remaining imagery was painted much more simply and with great economy: the bubble is just a few strokes of white and blue and the stonework thin scumbles over the dark underpaint,[5] for example. Quickly and thinly painted, these images appear to be observed from the corner of our eye. Because these paint layers are so thin and delicate they can be easily abraded. (In the Washington version the fingers of the child curling over the ledge, which are represented in all of the other paintings, seem to have been eroded for this very reason.)

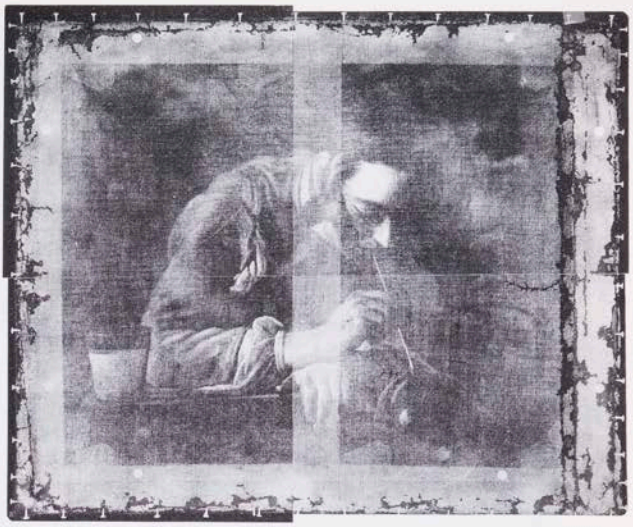
With the image almost complete the artist scumbled light green—or rather a mixture of yellow, black, and white pigments—over the background, blending it with the still-wet outlines of the primary forms to create a fuzzy atmospheric effect. By using such tricks of optical painting as scumbling (thinly applied opaque color), applying semitransparent colors over a double-layer ground, reserving the dark underpainting layer for shadows, and blending adjacent colors into one another wet in wet, Chardin created a very believable atmospheric space with light naturalistically modeling the forms.

On the very surface of the painting we see frothy white impasto for the highlights as well as colorful pastel strokes in the flesh, coat, and hair. The frothy quality was achieved by the admixture of a large proportion of chalk to medium, which bulks up the paint. As we can see, Chardin's painting style created quite a range of textures from thick highlights to thin shadows. Finally, impressionistic strokes of blue, pink, or yellow almost decompose the solid color foundations. Of the three versions, the New York and Los Angeles paintings show this last quality most clearly, the effect having been damaged by abrasion in the Washington picture.

Chardin's paint and pigment mixtures are quite complex. Forms are made up of sophisticated color combinations, and almost every color is a mixture of several pigments. Even what we read as white is not pure white. This is not only because his whites are made up partially of chalk, which turns off-white and

25. Cross section of paint sample from Chardin's *Soap Bubbles,* Los Angeles County Museum of Art.

26. X-radiograph of Chardin's *Soap Bubbles*, Los Angeles County Museum of Art.



a bit translucent when mixed with oil, for in fact he mixed in other pigments as well. As a result we perceive Chardin's white as white only in relation to the other colors. By using such paints and color combinations, Chardin created a warm, muted, interrelated palette that seems to exist by one believable light, which is the one in the picture.

1. The Los Angeles *Soap Bubbles* was made smaller at one time. From the X-radiograph it is obvious that the edges were once folded over, 3 in. on the right side and ¾ in. on the other sides, so that the painting would have measured 22 x 25 in. The changes in the Washington and New York paintings are discussed in the essay. The originally rectangular *Knucklebones* was cut at each corner to form an oval shape; it has since been restored to its original format.

2. Ross Merrill, "A Step toward Revising Our Perception of Chardin," *Preprints of Papers Presented at the Ninth Annual Meeting of the American Institute for Conservation of Historic and Artistic Works, Philadelphia, Pennsylvania, 27–31 May 1981* (Washington, D.C., 1981), pp. 123–28, provided help in identifying pigments and paint layers. Due to time limitations and in the interest of taking as few samples as possible, few pigments were identified absolutely. The main concern here is with the visual, that is, the color mixtures and what we actually see.

3. The yellow is probably orpiment. Analysis of some of the pigments was provided by John Twilley, senior research scientist at the museum's Conservation Center, using X-ray diffraction or high magnification.

4. Lead white and chalk; vermillion; and yellow ocher and possibly an organic yellow.

5. Analysis of a paint sample taken from the ledge revealed quite a mixture of pigments: lead white, charcoal black, smalt, vermillion, and probably red ocher.

27. Jean-Siméon Chardin, *Soap Bubbles,* oil on canvas, 24 x 24⅞ in. (61.0 x 63.2 cm), Metropolitan Museum of Art, Catherine D. Wentworth Fund, 1949.

← This page folds out.

All three paintings are reproduced at
the same scale.

28. Jean-Siméon Chardin, *Soap Bubbles*, oil on canvas, 36⅝ x 29⅛ in. (93.0 x 74.6 cm), National Gallery of Art, Washington, D.C., gift of Mrs. John W. Simpson, 1942.

29. Jean-Siméon Chardin, *Soap Bubbles,* oil on canvas, 23⅝ x 28¾ in. (60.0 x 73.0 cm), Los Angeles County Museum of Art, gift of The Ahmanson Foundation.

Suggested Further Reading

Conisbee, Philip. *Chardin.* Oxford: Phaidon Press, 1986.

Rosenberg, Pierre. *Chardin,* catalogue of the exhibition held at the Grand Palais, Paris, the Cleveland Museum of Art, and the Museum of Fine Arts, Boston. Paris and Cleveland: Réunion des Musées Nationaux with Cleveland Museum of Art, 1979.

Rosenberg, Pierre. *Tout l'oeuvre peint de Chardin.* Paris: Flammarion, 1983.

Wildenstein, Georges. *Chardin.* Paris: Édition les Beaux Arts, 1933.

Exhibited Works

Jean-Siméon Chardin (1699–1779)

Soap Bubbles
Oil on canvas
23⅝ x 28¾ in. (60.0 x 73.0 cm)
Los Angeles County Museum of Art, gift of The Ahmanson Foundation, M.79.251

Soap Bubbles
Oil on canvas
24 x 24⅞ in. (61.0 x 63.2 cm)
Metropolitan Museum of Art, Catherine D. Wentworth Fund, 1949

Soap Bubbles
Oil on canvas
36⅝ x 29⅜ in. (93.0 x 74.6 cm)
National Gallery of Art, Washington, D.C., gift of Mrs. John W. Simpson, 1942

Knucklebones
Oil on canvas
32 x 25½ in. (81.5 x 64.5 cm)
Baltimore Museum of Art, Mary Frick Jacobs Collection, BMA 1938.193

Pierre Filloeul (1696–after 1754)
after Jean-Siméon Chardin

Soap Bubbles, 1739
Engraving
9¼ x 7⅜ in. (23.6 x 18.6 cm)
Museum of Fine Arts, Boston

X-radiograph of Jean-Siméon Chardin's *Soap Bubbles,* National Gallery of Art, Washington, D.C.

X-radiograph of Jean-Siméon Chardin's *Soap Bubbles,* Los Angeles County Museum of Art

X-radiograph of Jean-Siméon Chardin's *Knucklebones*